

## 62nd Annual Meeting and Conference



National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

*“Who Is My Neighbor?”*

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus,  
“And who is my neighbor?”*

LUKE 10:29

# The CONGREGATIONALIST

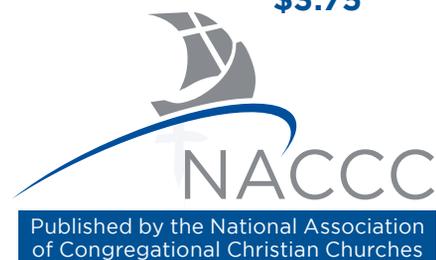
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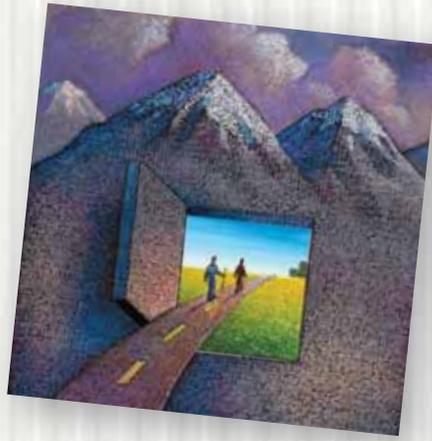
## Crossing BOUNDARIES

A WOMAN'S  
**JOURNEY**  
IN MINISTRY

YOUTH  
AND VIDEO  
IN THE  
**CHURCH**

LIVING  
WITH  
**ISLAM**

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# “I’M A PASTOR, NOT A FINANCIAL PLANNER. THANKFULLY, MY *benefits consultant understands me.*”

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## Edward Beecher (1803-1895)

One of the 13 children of Lyman Beecher was Edward Beecher, who also became a Congregational pastor in 1826, having graduated four years earlier from Yale at the head of his class at the young age of 19.

He was born in 1803, and by the time he became an adult the issue of slavery and its abolition was raging all across the United States. Many of the abolitionist crusaders were threatened with violence or were the victims of violence. Often, the printing presses for abolitionist newspapers were destroyed.

Elijah Lovejoy began his journalistic career in St. Louis, and by the time three of his printing presses had been destroyed, he had moved to Alton, Illinois. There, defending his fourth printing press against a mob, Lovejoy was assassinated in 1837.

Edward Beecher, who at the time was the first president of Illinois College and was a friend of Lovejoy's, was spurred by Lovejoy's murder to join the abolitionist cause. He wrote an account of Lovejoy's life and death, and he also produced a series of articles on what he called "organic sin,"<sup>1</sup> articles which became very influential in moving people toward the abolitionist position. Looking back, the abolition of slavery seems the obvious thing; but in that time, it was a ferociously-debated issue, with all kinds of shades of opinion between total support for slavery and total opposition to it. (For a parallel in our time, we might think about the issue of abortion.)

Edward Beecher, a noted theologian, in later life was part of the committee that, in 1865, produced the first statement of faith since 1648 that was agreed to by all the Congregational churches in America. But even more important for us today, Edward Beecher's influence lives on in our denomination. From 1849 to 1855, he served as the first senior editor of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*, our periodical that is still being published today as a quarterly magazine.

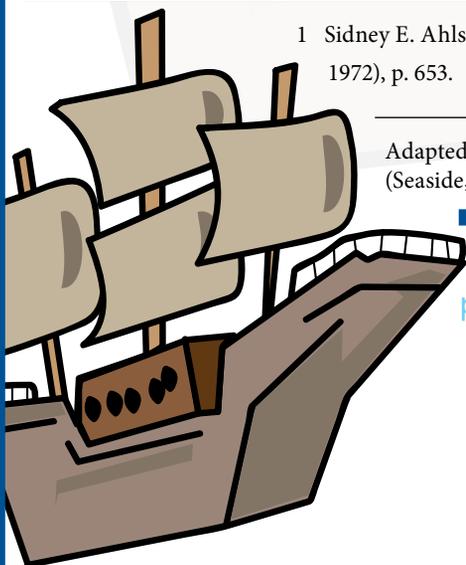
In 1855 he returned to Illinois as pastor of the First Congregational Church of Galesburg (the old "Brick Congregational Church"), and then returned to the East, where he served as pastor of the Parkville Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., from 1885 to 1889.

<sup>1</sup> Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 653.

Adapted and reprinted, with permission, from *The Congregational Minute*, by Robert Hellam (Seaside, Calif.: Robert Hellam, 2012)

All these died in faith, and received not the promises, but saw them afar off, and believed them, and received them thankfully, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

—HEBREWS 11:13 (Geneva Bible)



# The CONGREGATIONALIST

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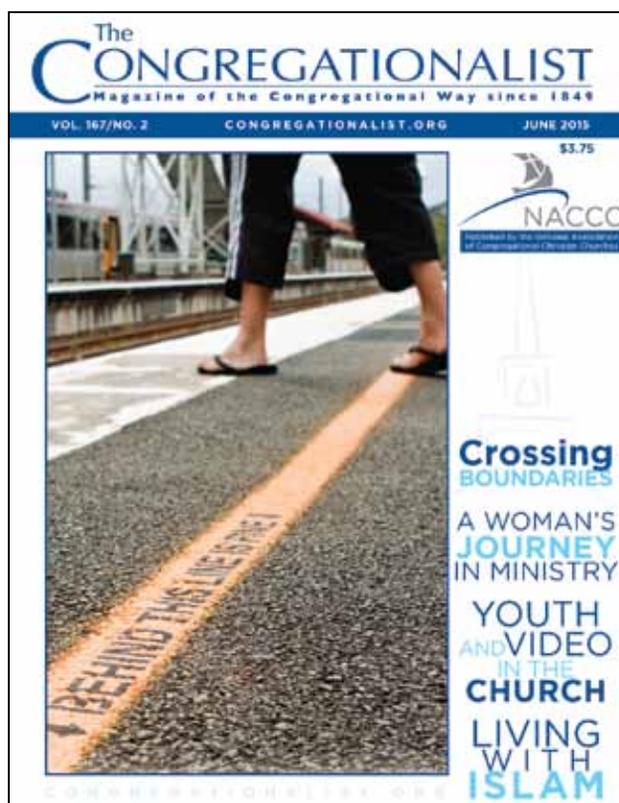
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#### ON THE COVER:

Boundary lines—some clear and others fuzzy—can help us avoid danger and distress. Arlin Larson examines the complex subject of boundaries in the life and activities of the church in “Out of Bounds!” pp. 7-11.

## ISLAM ARTICLE MISGUIDED

In response to Daniel M. Evans' article, "Islam: What's a Christian to Think?" [March 2015, pp. 26-29]—

His quotes were "cherry-picked." I can go through the Bible and pick out scores of verses that are violent and genocidal. All done, supposedly as the will of God. One group of scholars declares 10 million people were killed at the behest of Jehovah.

Evans alludes to "fatalistic predestination" with Islam. He should read the Book of Romans and Paul's view of divine predestination.

There are extremists in Islam and Christianity. I wonder if he wants to judge the Ku Klux Klan as definitive of Christianity? I pastored in Florida in the 1950s; the vast numbers of KKK members were Methodists and Baptists.

In my opinion, your editorial staff should be more selective in their choosing of articles.

**G.W. ABERSOLD, PH.D.**  
Highland, California

*Editors note: The decision to publish any article is made not by an "editorial staff" but by the one editor, Larry F. Sommers. We purposely offer diverse views in our pages, so that readers may judge their respective merits for themselves.*

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What are “boundary issues” in a church, and why do they matter?



# OUT of BOUNDS!

## Part 1

**T**he Patriots are playing: A long pass near the sideline, and a spectacular catch!

The referee’s arms, however, swing back and forth. “Incomplete pass.” Boos erupt from the stadium. A red challenge flag flies out. The referee disappears under a hooded monitor.

*Did the receiver get both feet down inbounds? Did he have full control of the ball before going out of bounds? What about contact by the defensive player?* The announcers go over and over it; viewers at home go over and over it. Neither the rules themselves, nor how they apply, is simple.

Even if one learns the rules of NFL football, they do not translate to other sports. While in football no play can be made from outside the boundary lines, in golf a player can hit from outside the boundary lines as long as the ball is on or inside them. But in tennis, not only can a player be outside the boundary lines, but the ball can be as well.

by Arlin T. Larson

Boundary rules must be learned separately for every sport.

It’s not only in sports that boundary rules are confusing and contested. Every area of life, every relationship, every social role has rules—some written, others not—about what is fair and foul, inbounds and out-of-bounds; what is permitted, what is forbidden, and what is required.

Church is no exception.

To avoid “burnout,” ministers are advised to set firm *boundaries* differentiating their personal, family, and professional lives. Sex abuse and other kinds of misconduct are violations of the *boundaries* appropriate to ministerial relationships. Likewise, in Christian self-help literature, church members

## BOTH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ARE AGENTS OF THE CHURCH, ACTING ON ITS BEHALF AND UNDER ITS DIRECTION.

are advised to set *boundaries* on their work, family, hobbies, church, and personal relationships to avoid losing their authentic selves.

Internal church conflicts are often about *boundaries*: What person or what group has what authority over what, when, and whom? Relationships with other religious groups require decisions about ecumenical and interfaith *boundaries*. How we relate faith and culture is also largely a matter of *boundaries*. In the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, the *boundary* line between ethical witness and political involvement is often argued.

This series of articles will explore these church-related boundary issues.

### MISCONDUCT

Even if there has not been a scandal in our own church or community, recent headlines make us painfully aware of child sexual abuse by clergy of all traditions. It's not only clergy; school teachers, coaches, scout leaders, camp counselors, entertainers—predators are drawn to child-related vocations. Even if they are a small minority, they can devastate their victims and engender serious mistrust of the institutions they represent. When there were rumors of misconduct by a local clergyman, a friend told me it must be child sexual abuse because that minister had been given an award by the Boy Scouts! I must admit I had the same thought; unfair to the Scouts indeed, but it shows how easily an organization's reputation can be sullied.

Child sexual abuse is only the most dramatic area of misconduct. Clergy and lay leaders have taken advantage of their positions to embezzle, bully, seduce, cheat, misrepresent, defraud—you name it. In most cases, the headline is so egregious that “boundary violation” sounds a little weak—“not even in the ball park” would be a more apt description.

The conduct that caused the headline turns out to be “just the tip of the iceberg.” Invariably, it comes out that boundaries have already been stretched, crossed, and sidestepped in multiple ways just short of misconduct or criminality. A pastoral counselor was discovered having sex with a client in his office in a church. Previously, he had begun confiding his own marital unhappiness to the client. They had been observed at lunch in a local restaurant. Then—perhaps

### EDITOR SOUGHT FOR THE CONGREGATIONALIST

**Due to retirement, THE CONGREGATIONALIST** needs a new editor. We are seeking a motivated self-starter with strong verbal and written communication skills plus experience organizing and prioritizing projects. Knowledge of and experience with the Congregational Way expected. Copy-editing skills essential, magazine production experience a plus. This is a part-time position; the editor works independently in his or her home location.

If you are interested in receiving information about the position or would like to submit an application, please contact Randy Asendorf, *Secretary of the Editor Search Committee*, [rasendorf@gmail.com](mailto:rasendorf@gmail.com)



without being required to seek permission from his church—he added office hours at times the church was otherwise unoccupied. Things built up over time.

The pastoral counselor lost his job, but the church also realized it had not set proper boundaries. It should not have allowed counseling sessions outside regular hours. It should have raised red flags about signs of a personal relationship. It should have been more attuned to the counselor’s marital problems. Looking back, troublesome signs stood out like flashing red lights.

Some asked whether the client was a knowing participant. In a professional relationship, this is irrelevant. The counselor’s job is only to provide clarification of the client’s personal struggles. Anything further is a violation of the counseling boundary.

Was the counselor the only one liable legally? No. *Both staff and volunteers are agents of the church*, acting on its behalf and under its direction. Clearly, the church needs to set boundaries.

## BUT WHAT BOUNDARIES?

“How do we know what boundaries to set?”

General principles for ethical conduct in relation to self, colleagues, congregation, and association are included in the NACCC’s *Personal Code of Professional Practice for Ministers*.<sup>1</sup> However, being more specific is difficult in a profession which involves a wider variety of interactions than most. Additionally, many boundaries are set and transmitted informally, known “by osmosis” but not codified.

The pastoral counselor mentioned above would actually be primarily subject to the guidelines for psychotherapists. A widely quoted article on boundaries in clinical practice designates nine,<sup>2</sup> as follows:

1. **Time.** Interactions should occur only during set appointments.
2. **Role.** The therapist’s role is only to clarify and interpret the client’s life situation.
3. **Place and Space.** Interactions are confined to the therapist’s office or a hospital unit.
4. **Money.** Definite fees make the professional nature of relationship clear.
5. **Gifts.** Generally inappropriate since they establish extraneous obligations.
6. **Clothing.** Modesty of both therapist and client is required.
7. **Language.** Use of first names is discouraged. Tone and word choice also enhance or threaten the therapeutic nature of the relationship.
8. **Self-disclosure.** The therapist’s personal life is not germane to therapy.
9. **Physical contact.** Beyond hand shaking, it is generally not appropriate.

To these nine, a tenth is now frequently added:

10. **Dual or multiple relationships.** A therapist should not have social, political, friendship, familial, business or other than therapeutic relationships with a client.<sup>3</sup>

1 [http://www.naccc.org/uploads/6/0/0/9/6009825/disc\\_personal\\_code.pdf](http://www.naccc.org/uploads/6/0/0/9/6009825/disc_personal_code.pdf)

2 Thomas G. Guthell and Glen O. Glabbar, “The Concept of Boundaries in Clinical Practice: Theoretical and Risk-Management Dimensions.” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 1993; 150:188–96.

3 Dual relationships are discouraged in most codes of ethics. See examples under the heading “Formal Standards and Guidelines for Dual Relationships, Multiple Relationships, and Professional Boundaries” in Kenneth Pope, “Dual Relationships, Multiple Relationships, & Boundary Decisions,” at <http://kspope.com/dual/>.

## WHEN MISCONDUCT IS ALLEGED, IT IS A HUGE RELIEF IF THE RELEVANT BOUNDARIES HAVE BEEN SPELLED OUT OFFICIALLY AND PUT ON PAPER.

Boundaries may sometimes be crossed without constituting malpractice or misconduct. For example, a therapist might accompany a client to court. Nevertheless, countless cases have demonstrated a slippery slope towards sexual and other misconduct. Additionally, courts and ethics committees often look askance at even innocuous boundary crossings once misconduct allegations have been made.

### DO THE SAME BOUNDARIES APPLY TO MINISTRY?

Psychotherapy's boundaries provide an instructive parallel for ministers, particularly considering the one-on-one settings in which misconduct issues typically arise. Ministers, like therapists, help people find understanding, clarity, and support. However, pastors could not begin to work under the same set of guidelines. In fact, the work of ministry *routinely requires violating the boundaries set forth above!*

Consider the prohibition on multiple relationships. Pastors are not merely personal advisers. They are leaders of religious communities. Congregants are the pastor's employer and supervisor. The pastor is pastor to several members of a congregant's family. In turn, the pastor's family is known by church members. The pastor sometimes leads and is sometimes led by church committees. Administrative functions and obligations are shared. Pastoral care, too, involves the thoughtfully considered efforts of the church as a whole. As a pastor, I often found myself walking a fine line between honoring parishioners' need for confidentiality and their simultaneous need for support from their church family. Most often, it works out because of the reservoir of good will existing in all parties. But it is not guaranteed!

The therapist takes a neutral attitude toward a client's beliefs, life-style, and morals. A pastor, on

the other hand, represents a normative spiritual and ethical tradition.

Boundaries of time and place are likewise much more diffuse for ministers. Pastors serve congregants in their homes, hospitals, community organizations, in most any circumstance and at all times of night and day. This does not mean there are no boundaries, only that they are harder to pin down.

The same is true when it comes to money. A pastor's relationship with a congregant is not determined by time that the congregant buys. A couple sought advice from their part-time minister—who was a psychotherapist in his “day job.” At the end of an hour, he informed them their time was up. They had not expected to be treated like clients on the clock! Perhaps misled by his experience in clinical work, this pastor did not seem to realize he was paid by the church to serve members of the congregation, without regard to financial considerations.

Even the rules on physical touch are less rigid for pastors. Recent concerns about sexual harassment and sexual abuse have made most ministers more cautious. All the same, a minister who will not hug or hold a hand will probably be considered too aloof.

Psychotherapy is similar to ministry in certain ways, but the correspondence is not one-to-one. It really is like in sports—boundary rules must be learned specifically for every situation.

### THE OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE

When thinking about boundaries, the first requirement is to be clear about their purpose. We define boundaries to provide contexts in which those purposes can best be accomplished.

The NACCC's *Misconduct in Ministry* handbook defines ministry biblically as shepherding.<sup>4</sup> Scripture



portrays the leaders of God’s covenant people, including Christ himself, as God’s shepherds. Their responsibility is the welfare of the sheep. A church, accordingly, is a place of sanctuary and safety—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Out-of-bounds is any practice that threatens the safety of the flock—individuals, congregations, even all of God’s people as the church reaches out to the world. Most egregious are threats to the flock coming from the shepherds—see Ezekiel 34.

These biblical and theological understandings are mirrored in the secular world by the concepts of “fiduciary responsibility” and “duty of care.” What they indicate is a requirement to act solely in the best interests of those being served.

### OFFICIAL RULE BOOKS

The rule book of the National Football League is 120 pages long.<sup>5</sup> That is for a game contained within a field 100 yards long and played in an hour of official time. Think how difficult it would be to write comprehensive rules for the infinitely more expansive and varied practices of ministry! Yet we, too, must understand what constitutes valid play and what must be disallowed or penalized.

The NACCC’s suggested guidelines are very general. The Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and others have much more detailed codes of ethics,<sup>6</sup> but they do not begin to cover all regularly-encountered situations. The rules of other professions, such as psychotherapy guidelines, also provide instructive but inexact parallels.

### AND UNOFFICIAL RULE BOOKS

When misconduct is alleged, it is a huge relief if the

relevant boundaries have been spelled out officially and put on paper. Often, however, things are more murky. The written rules are not sufficiently specific. We small-church pastors, who have no staff or only part-time staff, find ourselves meeting with parishioners alone in the church. We cannot always have two adults present in every Sunday school class. Home visits present a problem for all ministers. Caution in these situations often gives way to the need for pastoral care—even at the risk of wrong appearances, or of temptation.

Guidance can also be found in what is “usual and customary.” Daily life is largely guided by shared understandings, implicit or unwritten rules of what is appropriate. In judging whether an action is in or out of bounds, this “unwritten rule book” should also be consulted.

The bottom line is that it really does come back to ultimate purposes. God has called his ministers, clergy and lay, to shepherd God’s flock. Does an action further that purpose, or threaten it? Is it in bounds, or out? What can we do to make the lines more clear?



**THE REV. DR. ARLIN T. LARSON** is historian of the NACCC and principal author of the NACCC’s *Misconduct in Ministry* handbook. During his 40-year career as a pastor, campus minister, teacher, and college administrator, he has worked as a volunteer and board member for numerous social agencies, including a treatment program for victims of child sexual abuse. He and his wife, Sharon, a literacy coach for a local school district, live in Belfast, Maine, where he is secretary of the area interfaith clergy association.

4 [http://www.naccc.org/uploads/6/0/0/9/6009825/naccc\\_misconduct\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.naccc.org/uploads/6/0/0/9/6009825/naccc_misconduct_handbook.pdf)

5 <http://www.nfl.com/rulebook>

6 [www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/docs/guidelines\\_2010.pdf](http://www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/docs/guidelines_2010.pdf)

**NEXT: CLERGY BURNOUT AND PERSONAL BOUNDARY SETTING**

*A video contest can unlock the energy and commitment  
of the young in your church and community.*

# YOUTH + VIDEO = *Energy* in the Church

*by Les Wicker*

**S**ince the young are so adept at social media, why not use their skills and interests?

In brainstorming ways to market the First Congregational Church of Naples, the Outreach Committee came up with a YouTube video contest for youths. We decided to skip a newspaper ad for the Palm Sunday and Easter services and use the money saved as prize money for the youth who received the most “likes” for his or her video.

The idea was that the youths would promote the church to their friends and families by sharing their videos online.

However, the original idea—to pick the winning video based on social media likes—soon evolved into having a panel of judges pick the winner. This was to ensure fairness across age groups, since the younger contestants would not have as big a social media profile as the older youths.

## **How We Did It**

We announced the contest at our next service and promoted it on the church’s Web site, Facebook page and Twitter account. Almost immediately, several of the youth got busy with their cameras and their creative ideas, to make YouTube videos.

We set up a page on the church Web site for the videos to be submitted, and posted each entry on the site as well as on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.



Stacey Holcombe

*From left, third prize winners Chelsi and Kaitlyn Sokolich, second prize winner Marianna Low, and first prize winner Jacob Sokolich celebrate their video contest victories outside First Congregational Church of Naples.*

We also sent out a group e-mail via Constant Contact, reminding members of the contest and giving the links to view the videos online.

With this promotional push across multiple social media platforms, there was a large increase in the church’s online visibility—which had a direct effect on the number of people inquiring about our services. A lot of the interest stemmed from people sharing the videos online and visiting the church’s site to view the contest videos, which were well-received.

## **AMAZING RESULTS**

The campaign created amazing results as the youth’s videos went live. The Easter service had a record 355 people, the largest number ever to attend the church.



*Jacob Sokolich stars in the climactic scene from his winning video. Screen capture from the Naples church's Web site.*

The Outreach Committee attributes the attendance (up from last year's 307) to the energy and buzz created by the video contest.

Contest winners were announced the Sunday after Easter. First prize was won by 11-year-old Jacob Sokolich, whose video, "Finding Easter," depicted him searching for the meaning of Easter in Easter eggs, until he reached the church to find a small gold cross inside an egg.

Runners-up were Mariana Low, and Kaitlyn and Chelsi Sokolich. Each demonstrated not only their idea of faith as embodied in our church, but also the technical ability to create wonderful videos.

The idea of a video contest grew naturally from the desires to promote the church and to get more youth participation. The contest accomplished both tasks. Because the work of creating the videos was left to the young people, the church just needed to promote the contest and entries online through its existing social media networks. And because we posted the video via YouTube, the tools to add the videos to our site were handled using the embedding feature provided by YouTube.

### ANY CHURCH CAN DO IT

While our church has the benefit of a webmaster, it is not difficult to post videos on any church's Web site, providing the site has that capability. We are able to post our entire Sunday morning service so that others may view it. Posting videos draws a number of people to our Web site, whether it's a video of a service, a youth activity, or some event at the church. Videos are active and alive, as opposed to still pictures.

The youth video contest for Palm Sunday and Easter was so successful the Outreach Committee decided to have a second contest for Mother's Day. The success of the first video contest has engaged far more youths to participate and get their friends and others to "like" their video. The contest has created great energy within the church, especially among the young. The goal of pulling more people to the church's Web site was unquestionably accomplished.

Our Palm Sunday/Easter videos may be seen on the church's Web site at [naplesflchurch.com/video?page=1](http://naplesflchurch.com/video?page=1).



*THE REV. DR. LES WICKER is a graduate of the Divinity School of Duke University and holds a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has conducted numerous seminars on church growth. He currently serves First Congregational Church of Naples, a new church plant in 2004 that now has more than 200 members.*

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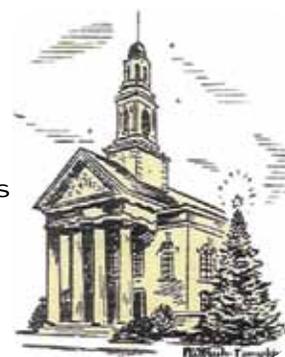
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What goes into the making of a female minister?

Here's one woman's story.

# STANDING ON OTHERS' SHOULDERS

A WOMAN'S JOURNEY IN MINISTRY

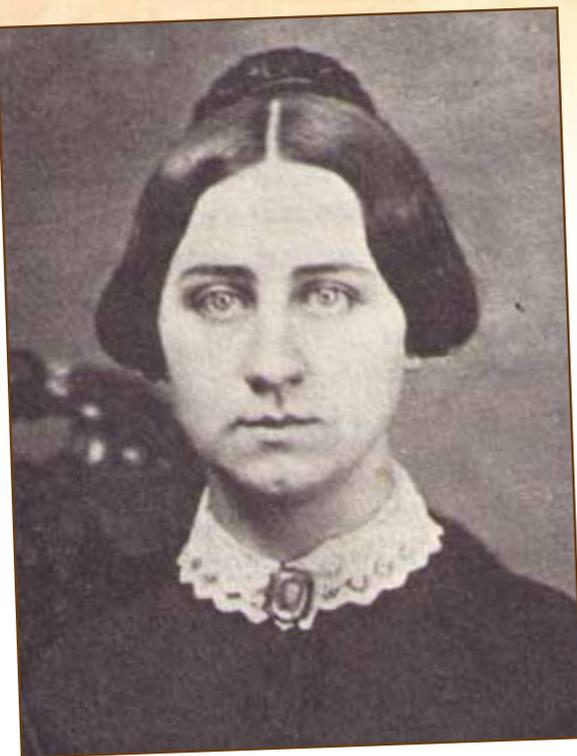
by Karen Robu

**M**y fascination with **Antoinette Brown Blackwell** began with a 2002 Mother's Day sermon preached by the minister at my church. He mentioned many influential women that morning, but the one that stuck in my head was the first female ordained minister in the United States. I was especially impressed with the fact that it was a Congregational church that ordained her.

Thinking those Congregationalists must have been a progressive bunch, I went out the very next week and ordered the book, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell: A Biography*, by Elizabeth Cazden. In reading this book I came to realize that not all Congregationalists were a progressive bunch—at least not on the subject of women's ordination.

Ten years later, while attending the Boston Seminar of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, it struck me that the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches was formed just over 100 years after Brown's ordination. What had been the progress in women's ordination over that 100 years? So began the research into my final paper for CFTS, "Women of the NA."

I scoured Annual Reports in search of women serving NA churches, searched the Web for information on names found in those reports,



Antoinette Brown

e-mailed relatives of past female ministers now deceased, and interviewed women currently serving in the association. At times it was discouraging; the progress for women ordained in the church has been slow. At other times the determination, drive, passion, and compassion of these women was an inspiration.

#### OTHER PIONEERS

**Rhoda Jane Dickinson**, ordained 1921, was one of the earliest clergywomen in the Congregational tradition and is said to have ridden her pony, Black Beauty, miles across the countryside to visit members. **Eleanor Wilson**, a Congregational missionary, was ordained in 1945 and became the captain of the *Morning Star VI*, a mission ship in the Pacific.

**Elaine Marsh** held degrees from both Hartford Theological Seminary and Berkeley Baptist Divinity School. She was ordained in 1946, and her first assignment was to a parish in Darby, Montana. Her salary was \$1,500 a year, she drove a car that continually broke down, and she lived in a house with holes so big one could almost throw a cat through them. She described Darby as exactly what one would see in a movie about the Wild West, complete with bar brawls. Elaine eventually found her way to Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, where she served in various capacities from 1959 to 1983.

**Mary O'Brian White**, ordained by 1957, was the first woman ordained by an NACCC church (Bethany Congregational of Cedar Rapids, Iowa). I interviewed her son Milton E. White (Ed), himself a retired Congregational minister. I also had the privilege of interviewing the **Rev. Jane Rathman**, ordained 1974. She held dual standing with the UCC and NACCC for seven years but eventually left the NACCC.

Finally, I spoke with two women familiar to many within our association: The **Rev. Dr. Betsey Mauro**, ordained in 1987, the first female to hold an executive leadership position at the NACCC; and the **Rev. Dr. Mary Biedron (Mimi)**, ordained in 1998.

#### PARALLELS

In researching these women, it was interesting to see parallels between their lives and my own. Like Mimi, I struggled with guilt when I no longer had the time for things like being my daughters' Brownie leader. Like Betsey, I did not grow up in the church.



Mary White

*They must  
have been a  
progressive  
bunch.*



Plymouth Church, Minneapolis

Elaine Marsh

*We discovered  
a church ...  
that welcomed  
everyone  
to the table.*

My family attended a Methodist church for a while in New York state, and when we first moved to Canada we attended a United Church of Canada. By the time I was in middle school I found church boring. My mother got tired of trying to drag my sister, brother, and me out of bed Sunday mornings. Our father went to church only on Easter, and so the rest of us stopped attending altogether. Instead we spent Sundays out in our boat when the weather permitted; or, during the winter months, roller-skating, ice-skating, or sledding.

We visited a church when I was in high school. When communion was served I followed my mother and the rest of the crowd up to the front of the sanctuary and partook. Upon returning to our seats, my mother whispered, “I don’t think you were supposed to take communion, we never had you baptized.” This offended me; it wasn’t my fault I hadn’t been baptized. This incident, and a “born again” college boyfriend who broke up with me because I didn’t “walk with Jesus,” left me feeling the church was judgmental and exclusivist. I had no interest in being associated with it.

After high school I earned a B.F.A. in Musical Theatre at the University of Windsor. My plan was to move to New York City and become a Broadway star. The first couple of years after graduation I worked in small, regional theatres around the country. I met my future husband, Tim, in Wichita, Kansas, where I landed a six-month contract at the Crown Uptown Theatre. We ended up getting married, buying a house, and having two daughters. So much for Broadway.

#### **DISCOVERING CHURCH**

September 16, 2001—the Sunday after 9/11—found Tim and me in the pews at University Congregational Church in Wichita. What we discovered that day was a church with a liberal theology, one that welcomed everyone to the table. We went from never attending church to never missing a Sunday.

In June 2003 our second daughter was born. After three weeks’ maternity leave I had to return to work at the Crown Uptown Theatre, designing and building all the costumes as well as performing. That morning, I couldn’t stop crying; I had always enjoyed the work, but suddenly there was something else I was supposed to be doing, only I couldn’t figure out what that something was.

I began, perhaps you would say, praying about it, or meditating on it. Every night I asked, over and over again, “God, what am I supposed to

be doing?” About a month later, in a Christian Education Board meeting, we learned that a full-time directorship of Children and Youth Ministries was being created. From nowhere, into my head came: “*That’s your job.*”

### **CRAZY IDEA**

The idea was so crazy I didn’t tell anyone, even my husband, for two weeks. With no background in religion and less than two years of regular church attendance, what did I know about being a Children and Youth Ministries director? When I finally worked up the nerve to tell Tim, he didn’t think it was so crazy. He told me to go for it, and he would support me. A couple of weeks after hearing about the job I was baptized, along with my two daughters. Afterwards I asked my senior minister what made him decide to switch careers and go into the ministry. I didn’t mention that I was thinking of applying for the Children and Youth job. It took me a couple more weeks to work up the nerve to call him and inquire about it.

When I did, the job was mine. I started work for University Congregational Church in July 2004. After three years on the job I realized that to best serve the congregation I needed to go to seminary. I enrolled at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Okla., in the fall of 2008, completing my Master of Divinity degree in May 2013.

Fortunately, the school soon added an online component to their program, for second-career adults like me. Some semesters all my classes were online, sparing me that three-hour-plus drive to Tulsa every week. Other semesters I had on-campus classes one day a week, and Tim had to get the girls off the bus, get them dinner, and take them to dance class. At times I wondered if I was doing the right thing. One semester in particular, it seemed every time I headed south to Tulsa something was happening at home that I should have been there for.

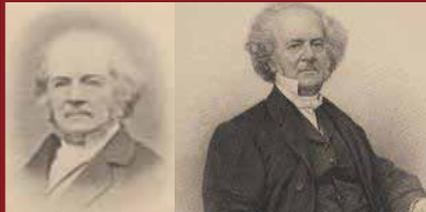
But all in all, I think this journey has taught my daughters that they can accomplish anything, no matter their age or gender. They know that I love them and that I cherish the job of wife and mother above all else; but I am not restricted to those roles because I am a woman, and they will never be restricted because they are women.

The journey has not been without difficulties. In February 2011, my position with University Congregational Church was eliminated. While my departure was stressful for me and for others, it also became a learning



*Mary Biedron*

## **Keep the Tradition**

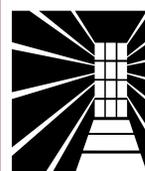


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Ric Thomas

Betsy Mauro

experience. I was buffeted by congregational dynamics I had not experienced before and felt expected to do things the way a man would. I needed to stop being so emotional, I was told; crying is unprofessional and shows weakness. But I am an emotional being. It is not a weakness; it is what makes me an empathetic person, concerned with the needs and well-being of others.

### ROOM FOR FURTHER PROGRESS

Even when churches welcome women, they do not necessarily see them in the senior minister position. As Barbara J. MacHaffie points out in her book *Her Story*:

“While many women who are ordained have relatively little trouble in finding their first position, they generally continue to discover that their career lines remain flat. They often take positions as assistants, associates, or pastors of small congregations only to find that their second, third, and subsequent jobs are much the same. They also end up clustered in interim positions, specialized ministries such as chaplaincies, and part-time work. . . . In addition, women report salary inequities between 10 and 20 percent lower than male colleagues in identical situations.”<sup>1</sup>

We have work still to do. As President Obama said in his March 7 speech at Selma, “We honor those who walked so we could run. We must run so our children soar.” I am where I am because of the women who came before me. I honor their work and gladly pick up where they left off.

I was ordained Sept. 15, 2013, the 160th anniversary of Antoinette Brown’s ordination. At that time, of more than 460 clergy persons listed in the 2013 NACCC Yearbook, less than one-quarter were women. However, 14 of 22 theology students who have gone through the CFTS program in the past seven years—nearly two-thirds—were women. Change is in the air, and I am excited to be a part of that change.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story*, 2nd ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 309-10.



**THE REV. KAREN L. ROBU** is an associate minister at Plymouth Congregational Church, Wichita, Kan. She received her B.F.A. in Musical Theatre from the University of Windsor and her M.Div. 22 years later from Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa. She feels called to be a voice for human rights and for interfaith dialogue and understanding. She blogs about her faith adventures at [allthewomenfollowedher.blogspot.com](http://allthewomenfollowedher.blogspot.com).

## News from the fellowship of churches

### BOUNCING BACK



Paul Malloy

Participants in the 2015 Ministers' Convocation.



Marisol Ferrer Malloy

The Rev. Elliott Wimbush leads worship.

“We deal with some of the highest expectations and some of the lowest levels of commitment,” **Donald Guthrie** told 41 participants in the 2015 Ministers’ Convocation, held at the Weber Center in Adrian, Mich., April 20-23. The group spent two days talking about resilience in ministry with Guthrie, a co-author of *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*.

On the third day **Joan Ebbitt**, a spiritual director, spoke of how consciousness is everywhere; flowers know to turn toward the sun and trees know when to shed their leaves. “To be spiritually aware,” Ebbitt said, “one must be actively conscious.”

The days spent at this Dominican convent were filled with conscious pockets of people gathered in quiet areas—walking the convent’s labyrinth, contemplating, reminiscing, doing pastoral care with one another, and resting in the arms of an Almighty God who says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29).



Marisol Ferrer Malloy

The Rev. Gary Wilson, foreground; and Paul Malloy, background, walk the convent’s labyrinth.

Worship services included foot-washing by **Rev. Elliott Wimbush** of *First Congregational Church, Maywood, Ill.*, and testimonies by Wimbush and **Rev. Norm Erlendson** of *Third Congregational Church, Middletown, Conn.*

—Submitted by **Rev. Marisol Ferrer Malloy**, *Congregational Church of Bound Brook, N.J.*

**APRIL IN FEBRUARY**—The *Sandstone Congregational Church, Jackson, Mich.*, hosted the Central Michigan Women’s Retreat Feb. 27-28 at Somerset Campground in Somerset. Forty-two women attended the overnight retreat and learned

about “Spiritual House Cleaning” from practical Bible teaching specialist April Barrett. The event also included worship with music and communion in a chalet-like lodge overlooking a frozen lake and snow-covered grounds. Churches represented

included the *Congregational Churches of Litchfield, Horton, Portland, Pittsford, Olivet; Arbor Grove and Sandstone from Jackson; and Plymouth of Lansing*. Next February’s retreat will be hosted by the women of Olivet Congregational Church. Women from Congregational churches other than those of the *Central Michigan Association* are also welcome.

**HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION—Stanley Mattson, Ph.D.**, gave three Wednesday-night talks about C.S. Lewis at *First Congregational Church of Redlands, Calif.*, in February. The series was partly a way of thanking a church that helped Mattson start the Redlands-based C.S. Lewis Foundation in the late 1980s. The

foundation is dedicated to advancing and refreshing worldwide Christian thought and appreciation through the works of the renowned Christian author and apologist—nearly 40 books including such must-reads as *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity*.

“I was stunned,” said Mattson of the First Congregational Church’s initial donation in 1986. “Here is a mainline, de-

nominational church that cared enough about the life of C.S. Lewis to take us on as a mission.” The church has continued to donate annually. Retired senior pastor **Lowell Linden** said the church gave because it believed in C.S. Lewis and thought Mattson’s project looked promising.

In the February talks, Dr. Mattson and his associate **Gayne Anacker, Ph.D.**, focused on Lewis’ spiritual life and his progression from staunch atheist to firm defender of Christianity.

“Even as an atheist, he was in pursuit of the truth,” Mattson said. “He came to the realization that there was a God. ... There is a moral order, there is a purpose.”

On average, 120 people—more than half from outside church membership—attended the talks. Evenings began with song and prayer and closed with fellowship. During and after the talks, Mattson urged the audience, like C.S. Lewis, to show their Christian colors.

“We’ve become the silent majority,” Mattson said. “As a result of that silence, we confirm the crackpots.”

—Submitted by John F. Berry,  
*First Congregational Church of Redlands, Calif.*

**HELP FOR HURTING CHURCHES**—To aid local churches coping with today’s increased church stressors, the Growth Ministry Council has combined two funds that have supported our churches for years:

- The Morgan Park Hurting Churches Fund—established in 1996 when the *Congregational church in Morgan Park, Ill.*, dissolved and bestowed its remaining property on the National Association—part of it as an endowment to assist churches in need.
- The 21st Century Pilgrim Club—originally known as the Ten Dollar Club and used to help churches receive financial help for specified projects, usually building projects, from churches and individuals throughout the NACCC.

In 2014, with both funds under-utilized, the council decided to combine them into the new Hurting Churches Fund—a single source of grants to member churches, based on existing funds and expected future gifts from churches and individuals. Grants of up to \$2,500 are available to NACCC member churches, with a \$10,000 lifetime maximum per church, for such purposes as—



Monte Stuck

*Dr. Stanley Mattson, founder and president of the C.S. Lewis Foundation, speaks at First Congregational Church of Redlands, Calif.*

- emergency capital or operational needs;
- paid consultation on matters of critical importance to the church; or
- other needs, as identified by the applying church.

In some cases, a grant may even be used to help a church meet its obligation to the Shared Ministries Fund, including possible restoration of an inactive church to active status. Such grants are limited to one-half of the church's Fair Share amount.

All requests and grants will be kept in the strictest confidence. Brochures and application packets are available from **Carrie Dahm** at the Oak Creek office and will also be available at the 2015 Annual Meeting and Conference in Salt Lake City.

The members of the Hurting Churches Team await the opportunity to serve your church. While it may be difficult to ask for help, team members pray that you will not hesitate to seek assistance in your time of need.

## IN THERE PITCHING



**The Rev. Lowell Linden**, retired senior pastor of *First Congregational Church, Redlands, Calif.*, smiles after throwing out the first pitch at the Feb. 28 opening day ceremonies of Redlands Baseball for Youth. The California town honored Linden for his 38 years of service to the local church. Linden also gave the opening prayer on behalf of the estimated 1,500 parents, players, and coaches in attendance. **Kelly Best** caught his throw while RBY board member **Kerry Kenison** looked on.

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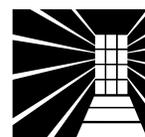
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*All three Abrahamic faiths proclaim the greatness of God. How can we live harmoniously in a world that includes different perspectives from our own?*

by Don Olsen

# Living



*“Allahu akbar,” shown here in Arabic script, means “God is great.”*

## *as a Multi-Faith Nation*

Our decision to come to Plymouth Church in Wichita, Kansas, eight years ago has been filled with rich and meaningful surprises. Six weeks after arriving, I was asked to join the Board of Directors of Interfaith Ministries. Interfaith is organized to “... bring people of all faiths together to build interreligious understanding, promote justice, relieve misery and reconcile the estranged.” To fulfill that mission Interfaith operates 130 transitional housing units, the Warming Souls winter shelter, a spiritual center, and food drives to feed the poor. Working hand-in-hand with Jew and Muslim, Bahá’í, Hindu, and Humanist to help the least, last, and lowliest has been a rewarding and enlightening experience. It also introduced me to the Muslim community at Wichita State University, through Interfaith Ministries board member Muhammet Ceylan.

The Student Association for Interfaith Dialogue was founded at WSU in 2009 by Muslim students and faculty. The majority of these students and supporting faculty are from Turkey. SAID’s mission is to “... promote peace in the world and contribute to a peaceful coexistence ... of different faiths, cultures, ethnicities and races. ... [W]e believe that everyone must be respectful to the environment and to all creatures’ right to exist, believe in

the sanctity of human rights and democracy and use all means at hand to make this coexistence possible.”

To that end SAID holds interfaith events in Christian and Jewish houses of worship. Two years ago they asked if they could bring a Turkish Thanksgiving dinner to share with us the week before Thanksgiving. One hundred forty Christians and Muslims filled our Fellowship Hall with sumptuous Turkish food, meaningful conversation, and a spirit of mutual care and understanding. New friendships were forged. We began to know our neighbors so we could more fully love them.

### **NO COMPULSION**

This March, Plymouth hosted a SAID symposium which included an imam, a rabbi, and a minister speaking on the topic “Free Will and Faith.” In his remarks about freedom within the Islamic faith, Brother Hussam Madi read from the Quran as Allah speaks:

- “There is no compulsion in religion. The truth is distinct from error.”—Quran 2:256.
- “The truth is from your Lord. So whoever wills let him believe, and whoever wills let him disbelieve.”—Quran 18:29.

Hussam proclaimed Islam a religion of peace, reading again from the Quran:

- “But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace.”—Quran 8:61.
- “And good and evil deeds are not alike. Repel evil with good. And he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend.”—Quran 41:33-34.

He instructed us, as he did his congregation in a sermon at the mosque of the Wichita Islamic Society: “Any offense we might feel does not justify any kind of property damage, or killing someone, or hurting someone or stealing from them or even speaking nasty back to them. There is no justification for that. That has no place in Islam. ... Actually it is a sin to destruct property or kill someone or curse them.”

I am dismayed that we continue to hear from many sources that the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad instruct adherents to kill any non-believer—and, some would say, especially Christians.

#### WHAT ISLAM IS NOT

Does the Quran instruct followers of Islam to kill Christians? No!

In the condition of war the Quran does instruct Muslims to kill non-believers, and especially polytheists. And so does our Bible: “They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their soul. Whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman.”—2 Chronicles 15:12-13 (NRSV).

And it goes one step further: “If you hear ... that scoundrels ... led the inhabitants of the town astray, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods,’ ... you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it—even putting its livestock to the sword ... then burn the town and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God.”—Deuteronomy 13:12-16.

And yet another step further: “O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!”—Psalm 137:8-9. These are difficult words to see printed in our sacred text, yet there they are. Violence against non-believers appears in the scriptures of all three Abrahamic traditions.

When Pope Urban II summoned the First Crusade in 1095, he wanted the knights of Europe to stop fighting one another, which was tearing the church apart, and to expend their energies instead in a war in the Middle East to extend the power of his church. During that long crusade to spread the church by force, the Crusaders did expand the lands of the church but also committed some terrible atrocities. Religion in general is no stranger to violence.

Did the Prophet Muhammad instruct his troops and followers to kill Christians and Jews who did not convert to Islam? No! He did not start a tradition of forced conversion. On the contrary, Christians and Jews were granted a protected status in conquered lands. History shows that Muhammad wrote to the leaders of his conquered territories, inviting them to accept Islam while emphasizing that there would be no compulsion for “People of the Book”—Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians—to convert to Islam.

“People of the Book” were accorded the status of *dhimmi*—a protected minority—which gave them civil and military protection, as long as they respected the laws and supremacy of Islamic rule. “People of the Book” under Islamic rule were not persecuted even though the *dhimmi*s were second-class citizens who paid an extra tax (*jizya*). Still, they were given full religious liberty, were able to direct their daily lives and affairs in accordance with their own laws, and participate in the empire’s commerce and culture.<sup>1</sup>

1 Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2001), xv.



*We cannot condemn a religious tradition for the unholy actions of radicalized militants.*

Are radicalized militants such as ISIS and Boko Haram following the teachings of the Quran or the Prophet Muhammad? No! They are not following the teachings of Islam's book or prophet. First, they are killing anyone in their path, even Muslims, which is forbidden by the Quran. Second, their methodology indicates they are most interested in money and territory. Thirdly, their affinity for public violence underscores their terrorist intentions of fear mongering. They are simply thugs, murderers, rapists, and thieves cloaked in religion. Such radical militants worship only the gods of self-righteousness, violence and power.

**FEAR**

On September 12, 2001, I drove by the same storefront mosque in Zion, Ill., that I'd passed twice a day for the previous three years. That day the mosque was defaced with offensive language. I was saddened. Returning home that evening I saw a small crowd of Muslims gathered in the mosque's gravel parking lot. I wanted to stop and apologize for the vulgar actions of an angry few

upon their house of worship, but fear struck me. What if they were so angry they started to hit me or had guns?

Flowers came to mind—flowers from the grocery store. Protected by flowers I returned, still fearful but compelled by my own sadness. Yes, they were angry. The imam approached, asking why this happened to them? I introduced myself, offered condolences and flowers. People of the crowd began to call out, saying they had nothing to do with the Twin Towers, why would someone do this? Saying good-bye, I gave the imam my business card and asked him to call me so we could talk. He did not, but I think of him often.

**PREJUDICE**

Why are people so quick to judge by association and appearances, especially on religious grounds? Our country's founders intended to create a nation that was open and free of religious bigotry. "The bosom of America," wrote George Washington, was to be "open to receive ... the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges. ... They may be Mahometans, Jews or Christians of any sect, or they may be atheists."<sup>2</sup> In a 1790 letter to "the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island," Washington wrote: "May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid."<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of Tripoli in 1797 stated, "The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."<sup>4</sup> We cannot condemn a religious tradition for the unholy actions of radicalized militants.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Meacham, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation*. (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2007), 245.

<sup>3</sup> Permalink <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/09/30/a-letters-journey-from-founding-father-to-religious-question/>

<sup>4</sup> Meacham, *American Gospel*, 19.

In his book *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, Jonathan Haidt writes: “The main way that we change our minds ... is by interacting with other people. We are terrible at seeking evidence that challenges our own beliefs, but other people do us this favor, just as we are quite good at finding errors in other people’s beliefs. When discussions are hostile, the odds of change are slight. ... But if there is affection, admiration, or a desire to please the other person, then ... [our mind] tries to find the truth in the other person’s arguments.”<sup>5</sup>

We need to interact with the diversity of the Abrahamic traditions, and more, as a check and balance against the tyranny of self-righteousness—the tyranny of fear of the unfamiliar—the tyranny of prejudice—the tyranny of our own clan’s present understanding. Interfaith dialogue opens us to the wonders of God’s amazing multi-verse. Life’s wisdom is much grander than our individual perceptions and the preferences of our clan. To open the possibility of finding those grander yet still common truths we must follow the ways of our nation’s founders and, moreover, the way of the founder of our faith tradition.

### WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

The pioneer and perfecter of our faith was asked which of the commandments was first. Jesus responded: “‘The Lord your God is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”—Mark 12:28-31 (NRSV). In Luke’s account of the Sermon on the Plain, we read Jesus saying: “But I say to you that

listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”—Luke 6:27-28 (NRSV).

G. K. Chesterton wrote, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.” The pioneer and perfecter of our faith commands one thing: That we love—this is the difficult but true issue in the matter. Will we listen?



**DR. DON OLSEN** served churches in Minnesota, New York, and Michigan. From 1998 to 2008 he served the NACCC as associate executive secretary for Missions, Church Development, and Division for Ministry and was dean of CFTS. Don has been consulting with conflicted churches since 2003. He is now the senior minister at Plymouth Church, Wichita, Kan.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 79-80.

## Summer Reading Suggestions for God's Free People

by Steven Blackburn

**Jonathan Edwards** is enjoying something of a revival in the world of theologizing, though this towering figure of American thought never really fell out of favor, at least not for long. Of course, Edwards is hard to avoid: He was not just a New England pastor but is today considered one of the greatest philosophers of the American colonies. For too many, however, Edwards is a one-dimensional figure, known best for his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which was preached unemotionally at Enfield, Conn., in 1741. This collection of recent works on Edwards reveals a much more complex figure.

To place the Edwards of “an Angry God” in a theological and historical context, Baird Tipson’s *Hartford Puritanism* would seem a good place to start. Thomas Hooker and Samuel Stone predate Edwards by more than a century. Though their theological connections with Jonathan Edwards are tenuous at best, the difficulties faced by New England preachers in relation to their unenthusiastic, even moribund, congregations did not seem to change much over the decades. The sweeping revivals which from time to time interrupted the quieter, “New England Way” of being Protestant were the exception, not the rule—including the movement spawned by the “angry God” of 17th-century New England as well as its 18th-century version.

David Barshinger’s examination of Edwards’ relationship to the Psalms—he preached more than a hundred sermons drawing upon them as his main text—allows us to break out of the one-dimensional view of Edwards. The Psalms, of course, display at least half a dozen literary types—laments, liturgies, songs of

praise, etc. Edwards did not confine his preaching to any one thematic area; he seems to have had a fondness for “joyful noise” psalmody, reflected in his introduction of hymns in his more informal worship services—something his more hard-nosed neighbors deplored. The wide variety in the Psalms allowed Edwards to investigate a similarly wide range of themes, including beauty, love, and light.

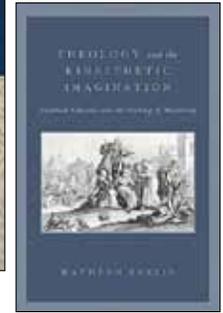
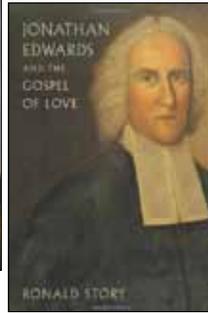
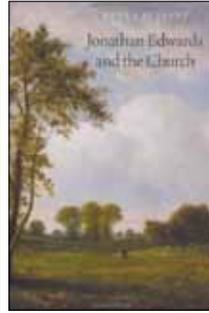
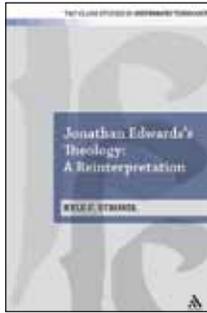
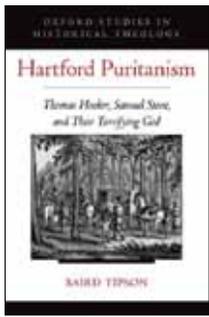
Edwards was transformative not just in terms of music and “joyful noise” in worship, but also in outlook. Kathryn Reklis, in *Theology and the Kinesthetic Imagination*, suggests that Edwards’ context was trans-Atlantic in nature. Embracing—or rather, having been embraced by—Enlightenment worldviews, Edwards champions the role of Reason in the life of believers. Far from stirring up human emotion as an end in itself, Edwards did not indulge in fire-and-brimstone rhetorical flourishes when delivering sermons. His aim was to argue, reasonably, that there was beauty in doing the will of God. Moving believers to engage in God’s will proved to be Edwards’ great skill.

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Ronald Story, in *Jonathan Edwards and the Gospel of Love*, demonstrates that the “angry God” was not only secondary to an understanding of who Edwards was, assignable to a subsidiary theological message, but was actually a mere tactic. According to this view, the “angry God” was a foil against which the God of



*Hartford Puritanism: Thomas Hooker, Samuel Stone, and Their Terrifying God*, by Baird Tipson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 496 pages; \$66.19 Kindle, \$69.67 hardcover (Amazon).

*Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, by Kyle C. Stobel. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 288 pages; \$19.24 Kindle, \$140.00 hardcover; \$39.95 paperback (Amazon).

*Jonathan Edwards and the Church*, by Rhys S. Bezzant. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 328 pages; \$44.08 Kindle, \$46.40 hardcover (Amazon).

*Jonathan Edwards and the Gospel of Love*, by Ronald Story. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. 176 pages; \$65.15 hardcover, \$20.66 paperback (Amazon).

*Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards*, by Seng-Kong Tan. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. 528 pages; \$64.99 Kindle, \$54.05 paperback (Amazon).

*Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms*, by David P. Barshinger. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 488 pages; \$65.31 Kindle, \$68.75 hardcover (Amazon).

*Theology and the Kinesthetic Imagination: Jonathan Edwards and the Making Of Modernity*, by Kathryn Reklis. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 192 pages; \$72.99 Kindle, \$68.75 hardcover (Amazon).

beauty, light, and love was put on best display. And this “kinder, gentler” God was interested not just in the souls of individuals, but in creating a godly commonwealth on earth. This version of Edwards is heir to the great “New England Way” stemming from 1620 and shows his fidelity to his forebears, even if he did not share all their theological peculiarities.

For Edwards, central to this godly commonwealth, of course, are the gathered churches of the New England Way. Rhys Bezzant’s *Jonathan Edwards and the Church* may not highlight his devotion to nascent Congregationalism as fully as some of the foregoing studies. Indeed, Bezzant notes a measure

of presbyterianism in Edwards’ thought, something which characterized many Puritans of the period. Still, Edwards’ focus on the Church in some of its primary roles—revived, pilgrim, purposeful, structured, accountable, missiological, prophetic—remains central to our own understanding of the Church in the 21st century.



**THE REV. STEVEN BLACKBURN, PH.D.**, is Hartford Seminary’s Library Director. He has served Congregational Churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and was elected to three terms as executive secretary of the Connecticut (now Northeast) Fellowship. He has also chaired the NACCC’s World Christian Relations Commission.

## NEWS

### MISSIONARIES AT ANNUAL MEETING

Dr. Josue Hernandez will attend the NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference in Salt Lake City, sponsored by the Mission and Outreach Ministry Council. He is the director and doctor for **Ministerio Vida Hospital** in San Pedro Sula, **Honduras**, a new international mission partner of the NACCC. Dr. Hernandez and his family were formerly with, and the NACCC formerly sponsored, the Honduran Congregational Mission.

Ella Smith, director of the **Morgan-Scott Project (Tennessee)**, will also attend under the auspices of MOMC. Morgan-Scott works with volunteers to repair homes; gives out seeds and fertilizer for gardens; and operates a food pantry and clothing distribution.

Many other missionaries will be in Salt lake City, including Julie and Victor Zaragoza from **Fishers of Men (Mexico)**. This will be Victor's first attendance at an NA Annual Meeting. Please take time in Salt Lake to talk with the missionaries.

### VISIT TO ARGENTINA



*Sharon Binger with Rev. Teodoro Stricker, center*

Sharon Binger, of People's Congregational Church, Bayport, Minn., spent two weeks at **Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational** mission at Jardin America, **Argentina**. "I received many, many, blessings," Sharon said. "Pastors Teodoro and Harding are leading and caring for the people quite well, as is their beautiful wife and mother, Teresa. ... A very impressive/miraculous amount of work is done here! God is blessing Jardin America!"

### GIDEON BIBLES FOR SEAFARERS

**Seafarer's Friend (Massachusetts)**, has forged a strategic partnership with the Gideons International. Gideons will deliver with Bibles in many languages directly to the Seafarer's Friend Chelsea office. "What a blessing this will be to our organization!" said the mission's executive director, Meredith Connell. "We are so grateful to Gideons International for their desire to partner with us!"



### VISIT TO CHAKHAI BY MRS. NAW PALE SAY



*Students of Chakhai School*

Naw Pale Say, secretary and wife to Rev. Sa Do, **Congregational Church of Myanmar (Myanmar)** visited the Chakhai Grace School for its tenth anniversary April 10. She received a warm welcome from the entire village. They had a wonderful Easter service of preaching and teaching to the Grace students and teachers, as well as to the village Elders. Each student received a new school uniform. It was a great celebration.

### CLEAN WATER

**Christ to the Villages (Nigeria)** is getting fresh clean water. The Rev. Matthew Oladele reports that for a few years now, they have been hoping to drill another borehole to alleviate the water problem they were facing at the schools in Shao. The former well served them for about two decades but caved in several years ago.

Efforts were made to repair it, but it was impossible to restore it to its original condition. During the rainy season it continued to work just fine; the problem came during the dry season. There was always a shortage of water for drinking and for other purposes like cooking for the boarding students and cleaning. This year the water level dropped greatly, and they could no longer manage the situation.

Matthew says, "Through your generous gifts we were able to drill a new borehole in the month of March this year. It was a success as we struck a huge underground water table. The depth of the new borehole is 70 meters (over 30 meters deeper than the former one). A 2-hp. submersible pump was installed to pump water up to the storage tanks in the school premises.

"It used to take hours to fill a 2,000 liter tank. Now it takes only 25 minutes when powered by electric



*Drilling for water.*

grid, and 30 minutes when powered by our generator. Thank you for the gift of fresh clean water!"

### NEW BROCHURE FOR MISSIONS

MOMC is creating a new brochure on volunteering at our NACCC Missions. It will be available at the Annual Meeting and Conference in June and on the NACCC Web site this summer.

## NEEDS

### SCHOOL SUPPLIES FOR OUR MISSIONS

August and September will be here before you know it. It is time to start thinking about school supplies for our missions. The following missions provide school supplies for the children they minister to: **Panamerican Institute, Bread of Life Mission, Morgan-Scott Project, and Maine Sea Coast Mission.**

They need: Backpacks/book bags, #2 pencils, erasers, scissors, blue/black/red pens, crayons, glue, permanent/washable/fluorescent/dry erase markers, notebooks, wide-ruled/college-ruled notebook paper, hand sanitizer, reams of copy paper, hand-held pencil sharpeners, colored pencils and rulers, and water colors and brushes. Money designated for school supplies is also welcome.

### PRAYER REQUESTS

Continue to pray for Rev. Tom Gossett's health (**Indian Trials Mission, Arizona**).

Pray for permanent housing for Rev. Philip Malakar, **Indian Community Fellowship (India)**.

Pray for the many projects of the **Congregational Church of Myanmar (Myanmar)**, especially the Grace Children's Ferry Car Project (\$US20,000). Currently children traveling to school each day do so by public transport. They often have to travel long distances, buses are overcrowded, and the cost is high. This project will reduce or eliminate stress and cost each family less.

Also, 45 students need sponsors. For more information, go to [ccomy.org](http://ccomy.org).

**Pray for Bread of Life (Florida)**, which faces new needs now as they are no longer sharing ministry with the local Methodist Church.

Pray for the annual mission work group from Olivet, Mich., and beyond, who will be going to **Misión Mazahua (Mexico)** June 18-25. May their travel be safe and the work be a blessing to the mission as well as the volunteers.

### Thank you for your support!

For more information on any of these missions; or to make a donation to any of the above projects; please contact Linda Miller at the NACCC office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618 or [lmiller@naccc.org](mailto:lmiller@naccc.org).

**The Mission and Outreach Ministry Council, NACCC**

**PO Box 288, Oak Creek WI 53154**

For a complete listing of NACCC Mission Projects, please go to our Web site, [www.naccc.org](http://www.naccc.org), and click on "Missions."



### J. FRED RENNEBOHM

John Frederick Rennebohm, 87, died peacefully Feb. 23 at his home in Elm Grove, Wis. He was a long-time member of First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, Wis., who served as executive secretary of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches 1985-1991 and later as director of development for the Congregational Home in Brookfield, Wis.

Born in Milwaukee Oct. 28, 1927, Fred lived in Madison until joining the U.S. Navy in early 1945. After Navy service he enrolled in the University of Wisconsin–Madison, graduating in 1950 with a business degree and marrying his college sweetheart, Marilyn Smith, soon after. Before his work with the NACCC and the Congregational Home, he held management positions with Robert W. Baird and Co., Allis Chalmers Corporation, and Heritage Wisconsin Corporation. He also volunteered with many organizations, including United Way, the American Bible Society, and the Literacy Society of Wisconsin. He was an avid sailor and a good friend and mentor to many in the NACCC.

He is survived by Marilyn, his wife of 64 years, by his daughters Carolyn and Julie, and by five grandchildren. One granddaughter predeceased him.

Gifts in remembrance of Fred may be directed to his church, First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa.



### ERVIN R. JOSLIN

Pastor Ervin Joslin, 80, passed away Jan. 13 at his home in Ocala, Fla. Born in Orlando on Sept. 29, 1934, he served in the U.S. Army 1957-1959. He later earned a B.A. in English from Georgia Southern University and a Master of Divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary in 1970. After serving the Presbyterian Church for 30 years in North Carolina and South Florida, he finished his race as senior pastor at First Congregational Church of Interlachen, Fla., for the past 14 years.

Pastor Joslin was passionate in his calling that people know and understand God's love for them. He was predeceased by his first wife, Carolyn Grace Short, and is survived by Martha Jane Joslin, his wife of 33 years, and by three children, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren, as well as by several siblings and step-siblings and a beloved bichon frisé dog, Finley.

# PASTORATES AND PULPITS

## ORDINATIONS

Oakwood Heights Community Church, Staten Island, N.Y., ordained the Rev. Gloria Jean Skeete, with the concurrence of a vicinage council, April 12, 2015.

## RECENT CALLS

SouthCross Community Church, Burnsville, Minn., has called the Rev. Susan Lester as senior pastor.

First Congregational Church, Hanson, Mass., has called the Rev. Peter Smith as senior pastor.

North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point, Wis., has called the Rev. Martin Hall as senior pastor.

## IN SEARCH

### SENIOR MINISTERS

Ashby Congregational Church and Hyannis Congregational Church (*share pastor*)  
*Ashby and Hyannis, Neb.*

Atkinson Congregational Church  
*Atkinson, Ill.*

Colebrook Congregational Church  
*Colebrook, Conn.*

Craig Memorial Congregational Church  
*Paradise, Calif.*

First Congregational Church  
*Akron, Ohio*

First Congregational Church  
*Ashland, Neb.*

First Congregational Church  
*Clear Lake, Iowa*

First Congregational Church  
*Saugatuck, Mich.*

First Congregational Church  
*Toulon, Ill.*

Glenolden Congregational Church  
*Glenolden, Pa.*

Little Brown Church in the Vale  
*Nashua, Iowa*

McGraft Memorial Congregational Church  
*Muskegon, Mich.*

Orthodox Congregational Church  
*Petersham, Mass.*

Plymouth Church  
*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Plymouth Congregational Church  
*Minneapolis, Minn.*

Union Congregational Christian Church  
*Marbury, Ala.*

United Church of Marco Island  
*Marco Island, Fla.*

Westchester Congregational Church  
*Colchester, Conn.*

## INTENTIONAL TRANSITIONAL MINISTER

Flatbush-Tompkins Congregational Church  
*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

# CALENDAR

**JUNE 18-25, 2015** - Missionary Assistance Corps trip to *Misión Mazahua, Mexico.*

**JUNE 20-23, 2015** - NACCC 61st Annual Meeting and Conference—  
*Salt Lake City, Utah.*

**JUNE 24-29, 2015** - NAPF/HOPE Youth Conference—  
*St. Louis, Missouri*

**JULY 13, 2015** - General copy deadline for *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* September 2015 issue - Contact Larry Sommers, [editor@naccc.org](mailto:editor@naccc.org) or 800-262-1620, ext. 1610.

## SAVE THE DATE

**JUNE 25-28, 2016** - NACCC 62nd Annual Meeting and Conference—  
*Detroit, Michigan*

